



Department
for Education

Multi-academy trusts

**Good practice guidance and
expectations for growth**

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It fulfils the Government's commitment to publish 'design principles' for academy trusts, including those establishing new trusts and existing trusts planning to grow.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Who is this publication for?

This guide is for all those with an interest in emerging good practice in the academy system. It will be particularly relevant for new academy trusts and maintained schools considering converting to become an academy, as well as existing trusts planning to grow.

Main points

This document provides a framework which helps trusts at all stages of their development learn from other trusts. It sets out what we know about the characteristics of successful academy trusts, and the barriers that they will need to overcome in order to secure their ongoing success.

This documents also explains what Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) will look for when assessing the capacity of MATs at each stage of their development.

This document will be updated to reflect emerging good practice as we continue to learn from the academies programme.

Foreword

Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) have been created by many of our best leaders, teachers and governors to improve and sustain standards in our schools. We know that the composition of MATs varies in different locations, and there is no one right model. There are great examples of primary only or secondary only trusts, but also examples of trusts with different types and phases of schools. In recent years, that has included the important contribution of the special school and alternative provision sectors too. Whilst there is no single way to create and lead a MAT, our 'design principles' are intended to share some of the best practice we have seen and talk about the types of strategic planning and thinking that underpin it.



There is room and scope for MATs to develop the model that delivers the ambition of the board and executive leadership team, but it is clear that there are at least three core elements that the strongest trusts exhibit. First, a board that contains a wide range of professional experiences that can deliver the dual responsibility of building strategy to deliver great outcomes for children alongside the culture of accountability that is necessary across the organisation. Second, the appointment of an executive leader, typically an executive head or chief executive officer, who is held to account for standards across the schools. Third, the creation and execution of a school improvement strategy that develops and improves the workforce, builds succession and enables the strongest teachers and leaders to influence outcomes for more children.

The aspect of MAT performance that stands out in many cases, however, is the way that the best leaders, teachers and support staff are deployed to ensure that as many children as possible benefit from their skills and expertise. In some cases, this means teaching specific children or taking leadership responsibility for a subject team or initiative or through coaching and mentoring making sure that teachers and leaders who need to improve quickly are supported to do so. I believe that consistently high quality leadership has contributed towards almost 1.8 million more children being in good or outstanding schools today than there were in 2010.

In spite of this, we know there are still performance gaps and inequalities of opportunity that exist. This is not the fault of the children in our schools. I believe that the MAT model gives us the best opportunity to close the gaps between the best and weakest performing schools in the system. Working closely with system leaders in the MAT, in partnership with those working in teaching school alliances and beyond, we can demonstrate that the most effective practice in any community can be shared so that new and better practice is introduced into the schools we want to improve quickly. There must be no barrier getting in the way of ensuring that more children benefit from the practice of the very best and we have to be strategic in making sure that this model benefits every type of school

and every pupil who attends a primary, secondary, special and alternative provision school, whether it is an academy or a maintained school.

This guidance is intended to support and encourage those trustees and leaders seeking to start a new MAT, as well as those who have a strategic plan to grow the number of schools they are accountable for in the coming years. In simple terms, this is how we intend to build the culture and ethos for this to happen.

We want to encourage, support and challenge the best leaders to take responsibility for more schools and to bring their expertise in school improvement to benefit more children.

We want to enable the best practitioners to take advantage of autonomy so that they make the right decisions for the right children at the right time. Giving leaders and teachers the freedom to implement and replicate what works is a key driver for the MAT growth model.

With autonomy comes a high level of accountability and this is the right thing to do. MATs that grow must be able to ensure that the children already being educated by the trust can continue to receive their entitlement to a good education even when new schools join. The RSC will work closely with the MAT leaders and boards – as well other key stakeholders such as LAs and Dioceses – to ensure that the capacity exists to do this.

The strength of MATs in building teams that have finance, HR, IT and site management expertise means that more teachers and leaders can focus on what they do best; great teaching.

At the start of the 2016/17 academic year we saw more schools than ever enjoying the benefits of working in a MAT, with 97% of schools converting to become academies now joining MATs¹. The Department has a key role in supporting this and the new MAT health checks that we are developing will be integral to our plans, enabling further sharing of good practice and testing trusts' capacity to help them identify the support they need before taking on more schools.

This publication intends to support all of this. In each section we highlight common features of existing effective MATs, as well as sharing some of the pitfalls and difficulties they have experienced too. It is exemplification of great practice by academy trusts for academy trusts. We also set out a number of key principles which RSCs will generally expect proposals for the formation and growth of trusts to adhere to.

¹ Based on 97% of all academies (other than free schools, UTCs and studio schools) which opened in 2015/16 are currently part of a MAT <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>

I hope and expect that this document will be a guide and a tool to support and assist you.

Sir David Carter

National Schools Commissioner

Growing the number of academies with care

The benefits of academies and multi academy trusts (MATs)

The government hopes and expects that all schools will want to become academies if they are not already. Evidence from around the world demonstrates that educational performance is improved by giving autonomy for professionals and holding them to account for the outcomes they achieve for young people². Moving control to the frontline - as close to the classroom as possible - is an effective way of improving performance. With this move also comes accountability for achieving results and meeting strict standards of financial and legal propriety. That is exactly what the academy programme does. It gives the best schools and school leaders the ability, money and power to innovate in order to build on their success and spread their reach further for the benefit of a greater number of pupils.

The creation and growth of MATs has seen further benefits in terms of more formal collaboration between schools, both to improve standards and increase financial efficiencies and sustainability. There are, of course, many different and vital forms of partnerships that support school improvement, including teaching school alliances. These can complement and enhance the benefits of MATs, but they are not a substitute for them. When weak schools join MATs it is not just a matter of drawing on the expert support to help them improve, but rather the trust's leaders are responsible and accountable for whether they do, in fact, improve. There are additional benefits for pupils too. Where feeder primaries and secondaries form a MAT and work even more closely together, the shared accountability and reduction in bureaucratic barriers, along with a shared ethos and understanding of each other's expertise and culture, aids transition and ensures a consistent educational experience.

These approaches and benefits are not exclusive to academies in MATs. They can exist, for example, when maintained schools share a governing body by forming a federation. The government believes, however, that they are most effective, when combined with the autonomy and sharp accountability for school leaders that academy arrangements bring.

The government has also made clear that schools will be able to become or continue as single academy trusts, provided they are successful and sustainable.

It is not the case that every academy or free school performs better than every maintained school, but the academy system provides greater opportunities for teachers and leaders, which makes it easier to put in place those factors - better teaching, leadership, career development, curricula and accountability - that incontrovertibly drive

² PISA 2009 Results, *What makes a school successful?* Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume iv). Accessed in PISA in Focus October 2011

up standards. It better allows underperformance to be tackled when it does occur and establishes a system more likely to lead to long-term improvements in results.

Learning from good practice

We want to share the common features of existing effective MATs as well as sharing some of the pitfalls and difficulties, so that leaders of new or growing MATs can learn from the experiences of others.

Of course, simply trying to replicate what others have done will not guarantee success. Nor is there always one 'right' operating model: MAT leaders will want to learn from the experiences of others to identify where they might adopt some practices and adapt others, but they will also want to exercise their autonomy and do things differently to best meet the needs of their pupils. As such, we believe the case studies and experiences highlighted in this document can provide a firm foundation, but one upon which we expect MAT leaders will build. We have been clear in this guide where we think something is good practice, and therefore highlighted as an example model, and where an approach is required practice.

The Regional School Commissioner (RSC) role in approving MATs and standalone academies

RSCs act on behalf of, and are accountable to, the Secretary of State for Education³ and:

- decide on applications from local-authority (LA) maintained schools to convert to academy status, including proposals from schools about MAT arrangements they want to set up or join;
- address underperformance in maintained schools by providing them with support from a strong sponsor, with the vast majority of sponsors being MATs;
- intervene promptly where academies or MATs are underperforming and are not on track to improve performance;
- intervene in academy trusts where governance has broken down or there are significant concerns; and
- encourage and decide on applications from sponsors to operate in a region.

RSCs typically have backgrounds as highly experienced academy headteachers, chief executives of MATs or leaders in education. They are appointed for their extensive knowledge of the education sector within their regions, and are expected to use their professional judgement to make decisions. They also share practice, build networks of MATs, and hold surgeries to enable MAT leaders to ask questions of the RSC. Each

³ Read more about RSCs' responsibilities in the [RSC decision making framework](#).

RSC is supported by a headteacher board (HTB). HTBs are made up of experienced academy headteachers and other sector leaders who advise and challenge RSCs on the decisions they make.

The RSCs are overseen by Sir David Carter, as National Schools Commissioner. Part of his role is to ensure that there is a balance between achieving consistency of decision making across the eight RSCs, while recognising that regional and sub-regional contexts present different challenges that may need different solutions.

This document sets out the characteristics that RSCs will be looking for in trusts that want to form or grow, in order to test their capacity to run successful and improving schools. This is to help trusts anticipate RSCs' likely lines of enquiry and investigation when a governing body makes an application for their school to become an academy or when a trust wants to grow and run more schools. This document should support consistency and transparency of RSC decisions; however, it does not – and should not be seen as – setting out a list of rules or requirements.

We welcome engagement and discussion on any of the points included in this guidance, which will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Why join a MAT?

When we asked school leaders within MATs why their governing boards had chosen to adopt a MAT structure, they said MATs:

- enabled governors and leaders to come together and take responsibility to provide better education in their community, rather than just in their individual schools, supported by a common ethos;
- facilitated the sharing of effective practice across a group of schools, so that when a particular approach has been shown to work, improving teaching and learning, it can be implemented across the MAT;
- ensured no school was left behind because the leader or chief executive of the MAT had the levers to secure improved performance of all the schools within the MAT, and were accountable for doing this;
- extended the reach of great leaders and governors – at all levels – to support and develop teachers across a wider group of schools;
- produced a pipeline of future leaders, by enabling a greater array of middle leadership positions;

- facilitated the recruitment and retention of staff, by giving leaders the ability to point to realistic career development paths and opportunities to specialise within a MAT;
- made it easier for teachers to support each other across the group of schools by sharing, drawing on and learning from good practice, taking on increased responsibility for specialist subjects and acting as a coach and critical friend; and
- generated economies of scale, enabling cost efficient commissioning and purchasing of goods and services, and/or facilitating the development of in-house services for schools across the MAT.

Schools interested in learning more about forming or joining a MATs should speak to their LA and RSC.

10 “things I wish I had known earlier”⁴

When we asked those involved in leading and governing MATs what they wished they had known at the point they established their academy trust they said:

1. Get governance right from the outset. Recruit trustees for their skills and then ensure they govern in the best interest of the MAT as one organisation.
2. Once you have got governance right, be upfront about local governance arrangements – what decisions are delegated to school level and which are managed centrally – when new schools join the trust.
3. What matters most is identity and that is what will make other schools want to join the MAT. There needs to be a sense of what the MAT stands for, which is not solely driven by a personality. The mission, vision and values must drive everything.
4. Work hard to ensure that the MAT’s workforce buys into the strategic plan and its rationale; it will be impossible to effectively deliver the plan otherwise. This means that MATa will need to have clear mechanisms in place to communicate their vision to all staff within the MAT.
5. Make sure you engage parents in schools across the MAT. It is easy to assume that parents are only interested in what is happening in their child’s schools but many are just as interested in the ethos and ambition of the MAT as a whole.

⁴ This list has been formulated based on feedback from leaders of MATs and standalone academies about what they have learnt since forming an academy trust.

6. Recognise that formal relationships with other schools and organisations need to be chosen carefully – often LAs, or where appropriate Dioceses, will often have key intelligence which should be drawn upon. Explore all options and carry out robust due diligence on other schools before agreeing to join their/your MAT ie. comprehensively assess a given school's suitability across the board e.g. both educational and non-education factors. It will ensure both parties are much clearer about the challenges facing the school.
7. Building the right support structures and skill sets is critical. It helps MAT leaders lead sustained improvement and significant change. It also ensures that the trust is not unduly reliant on individual leaders.
8. The operating and governance model needs to reflect not just the MAT you are when you are established, but also the MAT you want to become in the future. For example, appoint an appropriately qualified head of finance and/or a human resource (HR) professional early on, centralising administrative, HR and corporate functions where appropriate and standardising key finance and HR policies. This will ensure firm foundations are in place from the start and maximise the scope for efficiencies and economies of scale. It also helps to free up individual school leaders' time to focus on school improvement and making sure teaching and learning is as good as it can be.
9. Robust financial planning must be central to the overall strategy for the MAT. Several MAT leaders said that, in hindsight, they would have appointed a suitably qualified finance director earlier in their development.
10. Make sure schools within MATs are in coherent geographical clusters with a shared sense of community, ethos and values. These can be created in national or regional trusts by creating smaller clusters within them. Travel times between schools varied depending on the geography of the area although most trusts seemed to think no more than one hour's driving time between schools in a cluster was about right. This is important in terms of making the most of the impact of shared resources to effectively support school improvement as well as ensuring that governance structures work effectively.

Single academy trusts

Where academies choose to work together in MATs they can become more efficient organisations, provide better opportunities to develop and retain their staff, both in teaching and in leadership, and develop innovative approaches to support learning.

Nonetheless, schools can convert as standalone academies – also known as a single academy trusts – provided they are successful and sustainable.

To be able to convert as a single academy:

- school's latest Ofsted rating must be **at least** 'good';
- pupils' attainment and progress must be **high**; and,
- schools will need to prove that their finances are healthy.

Regional Schools Commissioners, in conjunction with their headteacher boards (HTB), will consider appropriate conversions arrangements for schools.

Role of the local authority (LA)

We envisage that LAs will still play a key role in an education system where more and more schools are becoming academies. It will be important for LAs to work closely and proactively with their schools, RSCs and other key partners – such as Dioceses – to identify the best arrangements for schools wishing to convert, and how they can best work alongside all their schools after those schools become academies. It is important that LAs work in partnership with their local schools and act as champions for parents and the local community.

LAs have specific duties in relation to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities which will mean that relationships between the MAT and LAs will be important on an on-going basis. These duties are complementary to those held by the MAT and also to the [applicable equalities and SEND legislation](#).

Any LAs wishing to establish MATs, must adhere to the statutory limits on local authority individuals to ensure the number of members that are local authority influenced cannot exceed 19.9 per cent: and, ensure the number of directors that are local authority influenced cannot exceed 20 per cent.

How an LA supports schools to become academies – Bromley

Bromley local authority is supportive of the academy programme; it made a commitment that all of its primary schools should become academies.

Since making this commitment the LA – both at councillor and officer level – has worked closely with the Department officials, in particular their RSCs, to plan out a converter action plan for their schools.

Having drawn up a plan, the LA appointed a project manager, designated to specifically work on the conversion of their schools – supporting the schools and overseeing the timely completion of local authority processes such as transfers of staff (TUPE) and land.

In addition, the Director of Children's Services, the LA project manager and Department officials have worked together to encourage schools to convert, including hosting LA- and RSC-led conferences to encourage schools to think about becoming an academy and to consider the options, such as converting as SAT or, forming/joining a MAT.

Strategically, the LA, the RSC and the local Diocese have worked closely with their schools to consider the best conversion arrangements for each school. As part of this engagement, the LA has worked with its governing bodies and headteachers to discuss governance arrangements and explain the conversion process.

By taking a proactive and joined-up approach to encouraging and supporting their schools' conversion, as of April 2016 all but one of their secondary schools are academies and 80% of primary schools.

LA role in the future school system

Thurrock LA has acknowledged that the role of the LA in education is changing, but nonetheless, it is keen to ensure that a good school place remains a realistic option for the children of its expanding population.

Accordingly, the LA has held meetings, attended by the RSC, the Director of Children's Services and the Head of School Improvement, to discuss a future plan for its schools and to identify the right arrangements for them in the future education system; what it sees as a Thurrock family of academies.

It was agreed that maintained schools would be encouraged to convert to become academies; whereas existing good and outstanding academies in the authority would be supported to form or join MATs, in order to extend their reach. In support of this

ambition, the LA has established the Thurrock Education Alliance, which sees school leaders frequently meeting with the councillor directly.

To promote their proposals, the lead councillor wrote out to all schools in the authority – setting out the range of options and their plans for addressing the educational needs of children in the authority. In addition, the LA has worked with the RSC to hold a number of open evenings, for schools and parents to hear more about their plans and has subsequently guided schools/academies through the process by employing MAT-development officers.

In addition, to address the issues of a pupil number bulge, the LA has worked closely with the local community to identify where there is a need and demand for Free Schools – including a special Free School.

Role of the diocese

Dioceses will have a key role in leading or supporting (as appropriate) the conversion of their schools. Accordingly, it will be vital that dioceses work closely with other key partners – such as the LAs and the RSCs – to identify the best arrangements for schools' conversion and to ensure that proposals support and protect the schools' religious character and ethos, and preserve the diocesan family of schools.

We have published memoranda of understanding with the Church of England Education Office and the Catholic Education Service. These set out how we will work with the churches in order to support their schools to become academies, including through the expansion of existing diocesan or church-led MATs and the creation of new ones. The memoranda also set out how we will safeguard the religious character of church schools where they are eligible for intervention or where they join MATs which include non-church schools. Any church school seeking to become an academy will require diocesan consent to do so.

MATs and academies of religious character - Catholic MATs

Ethos and Vision

The Bishop's vision for [Diocese of Leeds](#) academies set out that any school converting would need to demonstrate how it supported wider Catholic education. Schools would be part of pre-defined geographic Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMATS). A key feature of the MATs was that they would be based on parish structures, with a guiding principle that no school should be left unsupported. Each 'family' of schools (typically 2 or 3 high schools and their partner primaries) would be asked to consider the extent to which collaboration already occurred and could be developed within this structure.

Developing the MATs

Key positive features underpinning the development of these MATs were:

- The establishment of a head teacher reference group, which allows for discussion, sharing of ideas and expertise, and allows for peer challenge.
- An annual trust conference to facilitate discussions which enable participants to agree priorities for the future and update the MAT's strategic development plan.
- Though the power of appointment is not delegated to local academy level the trust has included local governors in recruitment processes. This has meant that those processes reflect both local needs and wider strategic needs of the MAT.
- By fostering discussion of capital development needs among schools within the MAT, this has led to greater acceptance of decisions about how to use capital funding, even when this means some schools receiving more support than others.
- Initially there were concerns that not all schools would have "representation" on the Trust Board and some schools and governors would feel excluded. The Diocese was keen that director appointments should be on a skills basis but recognised the need to keep schools and governors engaged. To do this, directors hold Board meetings on a rotating basis around all schools within the Trust. This gives directors an opportunity to meet with local governors and Heads and for them to observe the proceedings of trust meetings. This has fostered a shared sense that the Trust Board does not belong to any one school and that all views are considered. This is assisted by the head teacher reference group and by each school having a link director who develops a personal relationship with each school.

MATs and academies of religious character – Church of England MATs

[Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust \(DMAT\)](#) established in April 2013, there are currently 12 schools within DMAT across Coventry and Warwickshire (9 sponsored, 3 converters). The trust's school work together: building on a foundation of a strong Christian ethos; sharing skills and expertise to support each other towards achieving their aims; and, providing a high-quality educational experience for all.

Practical actions DMAT takes to support its schools to improve

- Support from a diocesan school improvement partner who is a trained and practising Ofsted inspector, who brokers school to school support. MAT to MAT visits are also arranged to broaden experiences. Furthermore, two executive headteachers employed by DMAT to support school improvement.
- Termly data reviews with senior leadership teams, the diocesan school improvement partner and governors. End-of-year external reviews verify school self-evaluation and impact of DMAT support. The trust emphasis on moderation at every level – within school, school-to-school and MAT-to-MAT
- DMAT-led continual professional development at all levels, organised and led by Diocesan Board of Education, the diocesan school improvement partner and executive headteachers.
- Leadership networks – Maths and English leaders; special educational needs coordinator and inclusion; computer and e-safety; early years and foundation stage; chairs of governors.
- Newly qualified teacher recruitment strategy and development programme, including induction tutor and mentor training.
- Partnerships beyond the DMAT through local Teaching School Alliances – diocesan school improvement partner brokers school-to-school support funding bids. Diocesan Board of Education and diocesan school improvement partner meet regularly with local authority improvement officers at a strategic level.

Key characteristics of governance in DMAT

- Skills audit and skills based appointments to strengthen both DMAT Board of Directors and local governing body.
- The DMAT retains local governing bodies with a delegated function for each academy. Consideration was given to shared governance but it was agreed

schools and headteachers still value their own governors who can be engaged in delivering the vision and strategic direction

- Annual headteacher performance management led by the DMAT with input from the diocesan school improvement partner, members of the local governing body and an external advisor.

Model governance documents provide terms of reference, codes of conduct and statutory policies such as complaints. Where policies need to be tailored to the school, e.g. behaviour, DMAT provides a written statement of intent which sets out expectations. The academy is then able to adopt a bespoke policy aligned to DMAT's vision, values and expectations.

Relationship with the RSC

The relationship with the RSC has evolved over the last two years. Initially DMAT was viewed as an 'intensive care' MAT: the majority of the schools were sponsored and the RSC expected the trust to prove its capacity and credibility. Key leaders from the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) and DMAT met with the RSC to demonstrate the impact it was having at the schools and the trust's understanding and strategic planning to ensure continued success. The DBE shared its five-year strategic plan with the RSC, which articulated the direction of travel for their school. The RSC now appreciates the trust's future plans within the Diocesan strategy. Working relationships between DMAT, the DBE and the RSC are now strong.

Governance

Effective governance is crucial to MAT success. It provides confident, strategic leadership to MATs and creates robust accountability, oversight and assurance for their educational and financial performance. The key elements of effective governance are set out in the [Governance Handbook](#), and can be summarised as:

- **Strategic leadership** that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy;
- **Accountability** that drives up educational standards and financial performance and effectively manages risk;
- **People** with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity;
- **Structures** which reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- **Compliance** with statutory and contractual requirements; and
- **Evaluation** to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

Understanding roles and responsibilities

The **board of trustees** manages the business of the academy trust and may exercise all the powers of the academy trust. Their focus should be on the three core functions of governance:

1. ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
2. holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
3. overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

As charitable companies limited by guarantee, every academy trust has **Members** who have a range of powers, including to sign and amend the articles, appoint and remove trustees, and receive the annual accounts. Trusts must have at least three members, but the department's strong preference wherever possible is for trusts to have at least five to cover for any absence and enable decision making without unanimity. The Department's strong preference is for at least a majority of Members to be independent of the board of trustees to enable them to exercise their powers more objectively.

Governance functions can be delegated by the board to **local governing bodies** (LGBs) or other committees overseeing one or a cluster of schools – delegations must be set out and published in a clear scheme of delegation. Regardless of the extent of delegation, the trust remains accountable for the performance of all its schools to the Secretary of State.

10 characteristics of governance in effective MATs

1. The skills required for governance of the trust are identified explicitly and set out in a role specification that informs the recruitment and appointment of people to the board and any LGBs for their skills, as well as informing elections where applicable.
2. Trustees take their own professional development seriously. They are inducted properly when they are new to the board, and continue to undertake training or other development activity as necessary to continue to develop their skills.
3. The chair of the board plays a vital leading role in setting the direction and structures for the trust. They support the development of positive working relationships between the board, the executive leaders and trust staff.
4. The board evaluates its own effectiveness,⁵ particularly when the trust is new and at key growth points, including commissioning periodic external reviews of their effectiveness to gain an independent external perspective of their strengths and areas for development.
5. Governance structures are designed for the context of the organisation and the schools being governed, not as a legacy of arrangements that existed in schools before they joined the trust.
6. The board and its executive leaders are transparent with any school looking to join the MAT about the level of delegated power that will be vested at a local level and the circumstances in which this may vary over time.
7. As the MAT grows the trustees recognise the need to review governance structures and delegations including the option of a regional or sub-regional layer of governance that spans groups of schools, in addition to or instead of functions delegated to LGBs at individual school level.
8. The board receives management information in a standardised and easily accessible format which enables comparison of the performance of schools across the MAT.
9. There is no duplication between the roles of executive trust leaders and LGBs in holding individual school leadership to account.
10. There are effective and meaningful arrangements in place to engage with parents and the wider community to seek their views and feedback, which in turn informs the scrutiny provided by trustees and supports greater accountability.

The MAT board

The MAT is accountable for all of the academies within the trust. This means that MAT trustees govern in the interests of the trust as a whole – there is no ‘lead school’ even if

⁵ Trusts may find the All Party Parliamentary Group for Governance and Leadership’s [Questions for boards and MAT boards to ask themselves](#) a helpful starting point.

one school initiated the formation of the MAT. The MAT board sets the vision for the trust and holds the executive leader to account for delivering the trust's strategic plan.

The board needs robust, standardised and efficient processes for effective governance, including for:

- overseeing and performance managing executive leaders and other key staff;
- receiving management information that can in turn be presented to the board in an easily accessible format that enables comparison of the performance of schools across the MAT;
- managing risk including setting and manage risk appetite, tolerance and mitigation strategies;
- ensuring compliance, regularity, propriety and value for money; and
- accurate and up-to-date documentation and effective communication of the boards decisions and impact to the relevant parties e.g. parents, the community, local governing bodies, Diocese etc.

Delegation

MATs may choose to delegate governance functions to LGBs or other committees including to oversee one or more individual academy. The extent of a LGB's role, powers and responsibilities depend on what the MAT board has delegated to them.

There is no 'right' model; different trusts may delegate different things, and different levels of delegation (or no delegation at all) might be in place for different schools within a MAT, depending on their individual circumstances or overall strength of the school. Equally, it is possible to have LGBs that are *wholly* advisory, identifying and escalating issues and risks to the MAT board, but not exercising any formal governance oversight or having any decision making powers.

Many established MATs have retained oversight of a number of areas such as setting HR policies, choosing school improvement support, oversight of SEND provision and setting schools' budgets. They also choose to retain responsibility for the appointment of senior staff, even if they involve and consult LGBs in the recruitment process.

Some MATs, however, have chosen to delegate a large proportion of the oversight of teaching and learning, including the recruitment of staff and curriculum models, to the LGBs of individual schools believing that school level headteachers are best placed to take these decisions. In these cases, the board will only intervene where they spot signs that things are going wrong.

Local Community Engagement

MATs are best placed to design the governance structure that will work best for their schools. Good MAT governance, whether exercised at board or local level, is informed by meaningful engagement with parents/carers, pupils, staff, local communities and employers to understand their views and listen to their feedback. We expect MAT boards (or any committee established by the board to oversee the success of individual schools or clusters of schools) to have very close links with individual schools through their LGB or otherwise and actively take into account and respond to the issue and risks they identify and escalate.

The board as a whole should take responsibility for understanding what parents think, while acknowledging that being parents themselves, parent who are trustees or involved in governance at school level have valuable knowledge and perspectives to bring to bear in discussions and decisions. They also guarantee that there is always a link between governance and the parent community. Where trustees or local governors on LGBs are elected, this also helps to ensure that a diverse range of perspective, including those of parents, is always brought to the table to enable robust decision making. That is why we have retained the requirement on all academy trusts to involve elected parents in their governance.

Geography

It is increasingly clear that geography can play a crucial role in determining the success of MATs, and in particular ensuring that the trust is governed effectively. There is no 'right' geographical spread or an upper limit of distance or travel time between schools that determines whether a MAT will be successful or not. Nevertheless, experience shows that the geographical isolation of schools within a trust should be avoided. That isolation makes it more difficult to reap many of the collaborative benefits of being in a MAT, as it becomes difficult for leaders and staff to work together in person. Most trusts find that a local focus, or a series of local hubs, makes it easier to communicate, share good practice, and create a common ethos within a trust.

[Case studies of MAT governance](#) produced by the [New Schools Network](#) includes a number of case studies in which trust leaders explain the how and why they determine the geography of their schools.

Examples on governance

A scalable governance structure

[REAch2](#) is a successful primary-only academy trust with over 50 schools across several regions. Established in 2012 by Sir Steve Lancashire who was then Executive Headteacher at Hillyfields Academy in East London, REAch2 started out as an umbrella trust with local MAT boards for the various clusters of schools. The original structure, however, made it difficult for the trust to offer the type of school to school improvement support it wanted to or to centralise and streamline back office functions. In 2015, therefore, the trust restructured to become a single MAT with three tiers of governance (see [here](#) for a one page overview):

- **The overall trust board** – which is ultimately responsible and accountable for the whole trust and entirely comprises non-executive trustees other than the CEO;
- **4 x regional boards**, each led by six non-executive Regional Ambassadors together with elected Heads and Chairs of Governors from the region – these boards have a unique perspective in comparing, contrasting and scrutinising around 15 academies each, informed by their understanding of the particular dynamics in the region; and
- **LGBs** that provide support, challenge and delegated decision-making for one or two academies. The [terms of the delegated](#) decision making are clear and published on the trust's website.

The model is underpinned by the REAch2 Governance Charter of the MAT's key principles, plus [specific, complementary remits](#) for each entity. This sets out, for example, how the LGB and Regional Director work together on appointment and performance management of headteachers, with the regional board scrutinising their proposed pay progression across the region.

Ofsted recently looked at REAch2's leadership and governance model and found governance to be secure at every level, supported by a unique sense of family and belonging shared across the organisation.

REAch2 knows that it needs to review and evaluate the effectiveness of its governance model regularly. This helps to identify further improvements based on a year of operating this model in practice. The findings of this review will also inform developments at REAch2's sister trusts, Reach4 and Reach South, both of which are using the same governance model.

More information about the trust's governance arrangements is available on [their website](#).

Recruiting the board you need, learning from business

RSCs expect trusts to have a high-calibre board in place to provide independent scrutiny, support and challenge of CEOs. MAT Chairs are taking recruitment to their board increasingly seriously, moving away from informal recruitment and 'accidental' board structures to rigorous recruitment, with skills audit and gap analysis. Board candidates are also interviewed as if they were applying for a paid position.

STEP Academy Trust in Croydon, South London, has used external partners to improve its executive and governance functions in order to build capacity as it grows in size. The Chair leads an ongoing self-evaluation process and recently commissioned an external governance review. Two years ago, the trust worked with [Academy Ambassadors](#) to recruit finance professionals to the board, appointing a former city Chief Financial Officer and Head of Operations from the banking sector. A rigorous external process allowed the trust to access a pool of experience unavailable to the trust acting alone and brought independence and rigour to candidate sourcing.

When recruiting to the board Danny Sullivan, STEP Chair, made clear the senior-level strategic skills required for the role and the level of challenge that new board members would face and would be required to provide. The new recruits were undaunted but entered the role with a clear understanding of both expectations and of the moral purpose of the trust: to work with schools facing significant challenge and with pupils starting life with significant disadvantage.

Mr Sullivan emphasised the need to build a board that can direct the strategic development of the trust in the same way that the CEO develops his or her senior operational team. In addition to recruiting from finance, the trust also recruited Dr Kate Chhatwal, at the time Director at Future Leaders Trust, in order to bring external challenge to the Chair of the Standards and Performance Committee.

Board refreshment is a continual process and the trust is now building capacity ready for further expansion – not just recruiting when vacancies arise. Earlier in 2016, the trust recruited Nikki King, Chair of Greenacre Trust and a Member of the Headteacher Board, as a Member. Nikki brings extensive experience from a business career and expertise from chairing a trust board in another part of the country and is leading a strategic awayday in order to review future strategy.

Academy Ambassadors is a non-profit organisation that helps build better MAT boards by recruiting trustees from business and the professions and introducing them to MATs. Since 2014, Academy Ambassadors has helped academy trusts from across England appoint over 350 senior businesspeople and professionals to board roles. Academy Ambassadors recruit a diverse range of board members including those with change management, facilities and estates, retail, legal, mergers, finance and acquisitions experience as well as those with general governance experience.

Creating geographical hubs

[Stour Academy Trust](#) is a trust of five primary schools operating in Kent. All the schools within the trust were identified as having valued added scores at Key Stage 2 significantly above the national average.

The trust is very clear what its priority is: the members and directors see it as a moral obligation to raise standards for all pupils, in each and every school in the trust, even though their existing schools perform well. But they also have a very clear growth strategy, because they feel a sense of responsibility and an obligation to expand, spread the reach of the great practice that already occurs within the trust.

Their ambition is to have between 12 and 16 primary schools working in hubs over four geographical areas across the county. The trust's leaders recognise that they need to build the capacity in the trust in order to support this, and have designed their operating structure accordingly and have a measured five-year expansion plan. The trust is aware that as more schools join they will need to consider to devolve appropriate responsibility to leaders and managers at all levels across the trust.

This was not always the case. The trust originally grew organically: two maintained schools in a federation converted to academy status in a MAT arrangement. A third and fourth school joined when the trust was approached by the Department, rather than as part of a clear growth plan. The trustees were still primarily the governors of the stronger of the two original schools, who were well suited to governing one school, but not necessarily providing the strategic challenge to the chief executive necessary when leading a larger group of schools.

Accordingly, in 2015, the trust proposed an overhaul of the governance arrangements. The new arrangements reflected where the trust was then, but also the trust that was likely to develop. Now decision making (including financial monitoring) is centralised with the MAT board, with individual advisory boards providing advice to the board on the development of each school. As the number of schools grows, the trust expects to delegate some decisions, either to an intermediate tier of governance, or to the advisory board itself. In order to facilitate the development of its governance structure, there is a clear expectation that there will be a maximum of 30 minutes travelling time between the schools in each hub, with each hub driven by an executive head teacher, reporting to the CEO, with a head teacher in each school. This will allow for a network of schools that thrive through collaboration and interaction, and are held to account by strong and strategic governance arrangements.

What will RSCs look for?

The Education Funding Agency (EFA) oversees the arrangements that provide Parliament with assurance that academies operate to high standards of propriety and regularity. MATs must operate in line with the mandatory requirements of the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) and their own articles: abiding by these requirements form part of a MAT's funding agreement with the Secretary of State. The EFA will also expect MATs to have effective governance arrangements in place – in line with the principles highlighted in the [Governance Handbook](#) and summarised above.

The role of the RSC is separate to that of the EFA. RSCs will, however, expect a MAT's governance arrangements to be in line with any mandatory requirements before approving any new academy arrangement. They will pay particular attention to whether, and the extent to which:

- trustees of the MATs understand the core features of effective governance and have the skills to deliver them in line with the [seven principles of public life](#) (the “Nolan Principles”);
- the board and the MAT executives can clearly articulate how the board sets the vision, ethos, and strategic direction of the MAT;
- in line with [Academies Financial Handbook](#), the MAT has appointed a single executive leader, who should also be appointed as accounting officer, who will take responsibility for results;
- the number of members that are local authority influenced cannot exceed 19.9 per cent: ensure the number of directors that are local authority influenced cannot exceed 20 per cent;
- executive leaders are held to account sufficiently for the performance of schools, teachers and pupils;
- there are clear arrangements in place to oversee the financial performance of the MAT and making sure public money is well spent, and in line with the requirements of the [Academies Financial Handbook](#);
- the MAT has a clearly defined and published scheme of delegation which sets out the split of responsibility for governance functions between the board, MAT executives, and any local governing bodies or other committees (the scheme of delegation and what it means in practice should be well understood by the MAT board and senior leaders in the trust and its schools); and

- the governance of the trust is informed through effective mechanisms to listen to, understand and respond to the views and needs of key stakeholders, including parents, staff and the communities which its schools serve.

In addition, when agreeing whether a MAT has the capacity to grow, or when approving a MAT arrangement, RSCs will pay particular attention to whether, and the extent to which:

- the board has a clear and realistic vision for the future size and structure of the MAT;
- the board has conducted a thorough, preferably external review of its own effectiveness and readiness for growth and in particular has a clear view of the skills it will need in its next phase of growth and robust plans in place to fill any gaps through training or recruitment;
- there are – or will soon be – common information management and reporting standards and processes across all schools in the MAT to enable comparison and aggregation of data at board level.

Geography

RSCs' first priority will be ensuring the school is run by a strong provider with good governance and strong systems for supporting school improvement. While in some areas there are lots of strong MATs that have the capacity to welcome new schools into their trusts, in other areas there are very few strong MATs operating. We want to encourage strong local trusts to take on more schools and to encourage other trusts to expand in to these areas.

In this context, RSCs will also consider:

- how to avoid geographical isolation of individual schools within a MAT;
- how to support MATs to develop geographical clusters of schools if they think there is capacity to do so effectively;
- whether MATs have given due regard to how geography may impact on governance, school improvement capacity and overall performance;
- how to avoid arrangements which leave a single MAT running all or an overly significant proportion of schools within a local area; and
- how to avoid individual schools – especially small ones in rural areas – becoming isolated outside of a trust, with limited options for joining a MAT in future.

Supporting school improvement

Each school is different and operates in different circumstances. Academy trusts that are taking on underperforming schools for the first time should consider what information they need in order to identify what needs to improve, and then how they deploy the capacity within their trust to work with the schools teachers and leaders to improve practice. These trusts will also want to learn from the common features and approaches that more established MATs adopt.

Some trusts have found it helpful to use the four stage model of school improvement (set out below) when they have identified particular areas of weakness. This model can be applied to teams, year groups, subjects and improvement areas, such as special educational needs and disabilities, just as well as they can be applied to whole schools. It can also be used by schools that are generally performing well but have identified areas of practice they want to improve. There are, however, other approaches and models, and trusts should make sure they use strategies and systems that are right for their schools.

Four-stage improvement model

| Stage of school improvement journey | Key leadership qualities |
|---|--|
| Phase 1: Stabilise <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School requires significant improvement• No clear underpinning for the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calm and reassuring leadership• Focusing on urgent priorities• Ensuring team members have the right jobs• High visibility |
| Phase 2: Repair <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishing more control• Reactive decision-making• Make the school feel more like a regular school | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embedding early improvements• Building a medium term plan• Retaining visibility, but increasing focus on quality assurance |
| Phase 3: Improve <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More proactive leadership• Embedding strategies• Improving outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitoring and tracking performance is key• Shifting from management to leadership• Increasing benefits from collaboration |
| Phase 4: Sustain <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confidence in performance• Increase innovation in delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Securing excellence• Looking to lead collaboration• Increasing focus on 3-5 year planning |

10 ways effective academy trusts lead school improvement

We asked effective academy trusts what advice they would give to other trusts about how best to ensure that every school improves, whatever their starting point. They said:

1. Develop a clear trust-wide school improvement model from the outset, so that schools are clear about expectations of them and also what they can expect in terms of support from the trust. It also ensures trust leaders have a consistent view of the best way to improve standards. It is important that they do not pull in different directions or prioritise different things.
2. Keep your approach simple. Focus above all on making teaching as good as it can be. This should be the focus of your school leaders' time too, so try to free this up, by centralising administrative, finance and HR functions where/when appropriate.
3. Use data to hold leaders to account for performance. Reduce unnecessary burdens on leaders and teachers by streamlining information management processes.
4. Standardise the approach to using information and external quality assurance across your schools. This enables the trust's board to be given consistent information so that they can quickly see and make comparisons of the performance of each school, both as a whole and in particular areas (such as the impact of pupil premium funding). It is also easier to identify areas of strengths and weakness within individual schools and, therefore, where schools can support each other.
5. Scrutinise the difference in performance and work with leaders across the trust to interrogate the causes and potential solutions. Do not assume that there is a simple solution or only one way to resolve the issue.
6. Expect that every school will be both a giver and receiver of support. There are pockets of strong practice in weak schools and vice versa.
7. Recognise that you will need to give different schools different levels of support and the same school will need different levels of support at different times – some trusts describe this as 'tighten to improve, loosen to be great'.
8. Collaboration is most effective when teachers work together regularly rather than just discussing ideas. Make sure this happens through things like peer review. As your trust grows, consider the creation of subject or specialism (e.g. SENCO) hub leads across a cluster of schools.
9. Make sure every member of staff has a personalised and bespoke development plan, irrespective of whether they are a senior or middle leader, a classroom teacher or fulfil another role. In a larger MAT, you can plot clearer career paths through your trust which will help to attract, retain and support the improvement of high quality teachers.

10. Learn from strengths and experience of other trusts and support those who want to learn from you. As your trust grows you will have more capacity to support wider system improvement.

Staff workload

We know that a number of effective MATs have taken the opportunity to standardise effective teaching approaches. They can also take account of the varying demands of each subject and allow flexibility across schools in subjects and phases to ensure the most appropriate teaching, planning and assessment approaches are adopted. In many instances this has proven to be effective in improving pupil outcomes. These economies of scale can also help reduce unnecessary work for teachers. In many instances this will enable teachers to concentrate on high-quality teaching, which is not only the single biggest factor impacting on pupil outcomes, but also has a positive impact on staff retention and morale. School leaders' time can also be freed to focus on school improvement by centralising administrative, HR and corporate functions.

Examples of different ways of supporting school improvement

Standardising approaches to the curriculum across schools

Some trusts have recognised the potential benefit for pupils' outcomes and teacher workload in developing high-quality curriculum and learning materials which can then be rolled out to their schools.

The [Outwood Grange Academies Trust](#) adopts a model of collaborative planning across its seventeen secondary and five primary academies. It leads the [Yorkshire and Humber Maths Hub](#) working with multiple partners across all phases and are involved in the Shanghai maths programme and the Singapore textbook project.

The maths leads from all their schools work together, which provides the means for them to develop a deep understanding of the conceptual levels required in each maths area which they can then pass onto the teachers in their own schools. All secondary teachers then contribute to the design of the materials to teach the concepts in key stage 3 and 4. The primary teachers have the support of a high-quality textbook and schemes. Whilst methods for teaching the 'require standard' content is discussed and agreed between maths leads, it is left to individual teachers to exercise their own professional judgment and skills in delivering the lessons. Planning sessions act as effective continuous professional development and collaborative working also means that workload is shared.

This means there is a coherent maths programme across the trust, with a consistent standard but teachers are free to teach in a way that can be adapted, according to their professional judgement and to pupil needs.

Collaboration between MATs

Both fledgling and established MATs can find it beneficial to share and learn from each other's experiences.

The Wakefield System Leaders Network (WSLN) currently comprises of over twenty representatives from academy trusts across the city. The group was brokered by the RSC to establish a network of trusts to collaborate and explore how to make the most of the freedoms and opportunities that becoming an academy brings.

The aim of the WSLN is to create a network group where innovation and collaboration impact on outcomes for children through shared strategies for school improvement, procurement, recruitment, retention, governance and much more.

Although the group is relatively new, the benefits of collaboration are already becoming evident:

- A shared understanding that the group will support and promote appropriate growth and not view expanding MATs as predatory competitors.
- Agreeing to organise a city wide event to inform and support schools considering conversion.
- support for new trusts from established trusts, including on how to centralise services.
- An agreement to collaborate on a free school application with a view to addressing Wakefield's shortfall in alternative provision.
- Providing shared support for new trusts from established trusts. Support takes many forms, including strategic planning, advice on how to centralise services effectively and numerous agreements to share resources. A specific example includes an experienced school improvement officer from an established trust joining a starter trust's strategic committee.

A CEO of a newly established trust who has joined WSLN commented:

"As a starter trust we have benefited greatly from working alongside other MATs and SATs. Leaders of the more established trusts have been very supportive and as CEO, I have been able to draw upon the expertise of my more experienced colleagues."

Trusts interested in forming or joining a network with other trusts should speak to their RSC.

MATs working in partnership with each other

The [Cambridge Primary Education Trust](#) (CPET) is a small trust of 4 primary schools. While the trust's schools are already part of a local teaching school alliance, the trust recognised that they could realise further benefits by establishing closer working links with another trust in the area.

Consequently CPET now work with [Cambridge Meridian Academy Trust](#) (CMAT), a larger cross-phase MAT in the area. Examples of the ways the trusts work together include:

- trustees are 'cross-pollinated' with several sitting on both trust boards
- staff at all levels do CPD at schools within both trusts
- the larger CMAT provides some back office functions for the smaller CPET

Whilst trustees of the respective trusts were initially reticent to the trusts working collaboratively, fearing it was early stages of a 'takeover', the benefits – as listed below – soon became apparent. The two trusts now exist with their individual identity and ethos in place, but are able to draw on the following:

- opportunities for challenge and school-to-school support – including CPET leadership support for new primary schools to CMAT
- sharing of both pedagogical and organisational good practice between growing MATs
- ability to develop 'feeder networks'
- pooled research and increased professional development

Given the success of the arrangement to date, CPET and CMAT are now considering bringing more schools/trusts into their partnership working arrangement.

Trusts who are interested in partnership working, but unsure of how to identify a suitable partner trust, should speak to their RSC in the first instance.

Drawing on expertise beyond the state-funded sector

In a unique arrangement, one of the country's highest-performing MATs, the Harris Federation, joined up with the independent Westminster School, to create the [Harris Westminster Sixth Form](#) (HWSF).

HWSF opened in September 2014, with a view to providing access to high-performing sixth form provision, which combines the strengths of Westminster School in teaching academically able pupils with the Harris Federation's experience in establishing and running outstanding maintained sector schools across London. In promoting a mix of pupils, HWSF prioritises pupils eligible for pupil premium through its admissions

criteria.

Some of the key benefits of the HWSF arrangements include:

- pupils learning from new perspectives across both schools;
- sharing of curriculum and pedagogical expertise;
- shared staffing/dynamic deployment;
- preparing students for elite HE institutions; and
- networking opportunities.

Pupils at HWSF are [imbued with a passion for learning and the pursuit of academic excellence](#) and benefit from the enriched curriculum and expertise resulting from the relationship between the schools. In further testament to the schools high-standards, in the last year, over half pupils at HWSF went onto study at a Russell Group university.

Reducing unnecessary teacher workload

The DfE [published three reports looking at teacher workload](#) in Spring 2016. In response, the [Co-operative Academy Trust](#) invited teaching and non-teaching staff to join a working group to consider what could be gained through addressing the issue as a MAT. The trust knew there would be great value from a coordinated approach and found significant benefit in enabling discussion between staff in both phases across the eight schools the trust runs in the north of England.

When discussing planning, the working group recommended that reliable and robust schemes of work should be made available for all teachers and that a tailored approach to planning should be adopted, according to teacher needs and preferences. High expectations are set consistently across the trust but such an approach to planning ensures teacher creativity can be accommodated, as well as ensuring each subject has the most appropriate planning format and approach to achieve the highest standards. Shared schemes also mean that workload issues can be addressed.

Ensuring effective teaching in every classroom

Some Academy Trusts have chosen to develop and roll out pedagogical approaches across the trust that promote consistent and high-quality practice removing whilst reducing the burden on teachers.

[Durrington Academy Trust](#) has taken a 'simple and focused' approach to school improvement allowing teachers and leaders to focus on their core purpose – to ensure that teaching is effective in every classroom, every day. The Trust has identified six evidence-informed pedagogical principles, - which contribute to great teaching: challenge, modelling, explanation, practice, questioning and feedback. Teachers are expected to implement these principles well in their lessons, but in a way that that best suits their teaching style.

Subject teachers have identified the form of feedback that best suits their subject and then use these principles to state what effective feedback will look like in their curriculum area rather than following a generic policy. As a result of this, there is now a greater emphasis on 'live marking' i.e. teachers giving pupils formative, short, written (or oral) feedback in the lessons as they are doing their work, meaning that teachers do not always need to take home sets of books to mark. Not only has this reduced teacher workload, but it has proven itself to be an effective form of feedback, as it is in the context of the lesson; experience to date is that pupils are responding well to this immediate feedback.

The senior leadership team keep these approaches under constant review. They question what they are asking teachers and leaders to do and if it is taking them away from their core purpose, ask themselves whether it really needs to be done? In this culture, teaching and learning constantly drives all that they do.

Sharing expertise and services

Many education leaders have recognised that by forming a MAT, expertise and services can be shared across a number of schools, freeing up headteacher time to focus on educational priorities.

[Warriner MAT](#) is made up of one large secondary school and three small rural primary schools (110 pupils or smaller) in North Oxfordshire.

The MAT was formed when the headteachers at the local partnership meeting recognised how much of the primary headteachers' time was diverted away from supporting excellent teaching and learning. Instead they were regularly called on to undertake building and ground maintenance and other routine tasks such as fixing leaks and gritting the site when it was icy.

Now an established MAT, the trust's headteachers cite four main advantages:

- **Central administrative services saves money and removes burdens** from headteachers and teachers. Payroll, invoicing, budgeting, bulk purchasing, contract negotiations, recruitment administration, policies, caretaker/facilities management and HR are all undertaken centrally, and within the first six months of operation, over 5% savings had been generated across central contracts. This money is now redeployed to maximise the impact for pupils.
- **Headteachers and teachers are better supported** and are able to learn and share good practice. Teachers across the four schools (both primary and secondary) observe and learn from each other to improve the quality of teaching for all pupils. They now jointly plan lessons. This helps to reduce teacher workload and increases creativity. This is particularly helpful for small schools where there is only one teacher per year group. Headteachers also work together and support each other to manage change. While it would have been possible to collaborate in this way outside of the MAT structure, it was the formation of the MAT that was provided the impetus for it.
- **Access to more specialised staff and resources.** The schools share a dedicated special educational needs coordinator, which gives their pupils access to high quality, specialist support that they would not otherwise have had.
- **Governance is more focused** on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and on the progress made by pupils. This is because the central team within the MAT is able to provide advice and guidance on various reports and requirements that might otherwise have eaten up valuable time.

What will RSCs look for?

There is no expectation that all academies or trusts should pursue the same approach to supporting attainment and school improvement. They will, however, be expected to have the capacity to run strong and improving schools. Before approving an academy arrangement, RSCs will use their professional expertise to judge the capacity of the trust. In doing so, they will take in to account the particular circumstances and maturity of the trust. As part of their considerations they may test whether, and the extent to which, a trust:

- has leaders that have a clear understanding of excellent teaching and learning practice for all pupils including those with additional needs – such as special educational needs and difficulties, those with English as an additional language etc.;
- has a clear, quality-driven education vision, which is embedded into their curriculum and school improvement models;
- has the capacity to deliver this vision – and any improvements needed – sustainably within the budget, staffing and other resources available;
- uses information and intelligence to hold leaders to account for performance;
- understands the needs of different student groups being educated within the trust;
- ensures that information about children's progress at school is well understood and acted upon throughout the organisation; and
- has a clear plan for how they will communicate with parents.

When agreeing whether a MAT has the capacity to grow, or when approving a MAT arrangement, RSCs will want to explore with the trust:

- the plans for medium and long-term development of the trust and how they build capacity within their trust and their schools;
- how it intends to support school improvement and whether this is underpinned by a clear school improvement model;
- what the needs and development challenges are for all the schools within the trust, irrespective of current performance levels;
- whether the trust's model of due diligence enables the depth of the operational and strategic challenge to be fully understood; and
- how the trust will contribute to wider system improvement and develop and retain good links with other MATs, teaching schools and a wide range of stakeholders.

MATs that want to support the improvement of schools that are performing poorly, will need to [apply to be an approved sponsor](#), if they are not one already. Sponsors need to demonstrate a strong track record in supporting school improvement, or have ready access to sufficient school improvement expertise.

People and leadership

Ensuring that a trust has the right leaders and the right team to achieve its objectives is crucial. In other parts of this document we have already highlighted that many trusts think being a MAT helps them build a strong and sustainable workforce, and facilitates the recruitment and retention of staff. In this section we highlight some of the ways in which trusts have built their team and developed their staff.

10 ways effective MATs make sure they have a strong team

1. Have a strategic plan which turns your vision in to reality for the organisation as a whole rather than for individual schools. This will help you be clear about the workforce you need.
2. Build staffing structures at the MAT level as well as the school level. The trust's workforce needs to think of itself as one team if it is to make the most of the talent and resources within the trust.
3. Develop your strategic plan collaboratively, involving those who will be charged with delivering it. This helps to ensure every employee understands their role in delivering the plan and feels valued for their wider contribution.
4. Trust leaders, chief executives or executive leaders, need to be able to lead, performance manage and develop the team of academy principals and senior leaders.
5. Executive leaders need support too, both from good people and good structures. It helps them be better able to deal with pressure and unforeseen problems. It can also make the difference between incremental and transformational improvement.
6. Create a culture, systems and processes that promote ongoing development and progression of both individuals and the organisation.
7. Identify skills (and skills gaps) across the trust and all schools through a trust-wide skills audit.
8. Establish a programme for continuous professional development involving staff across the trust.
9. Grow and develop the next middle and senior leaders by deploying them across a group of schools, with the expectation of movement between schools within the trust. This helps to create a healthy environment for promotion.
10. Ensure succession planning is part of the trust's overall strategic management, not as a response to crisis. This enables the trust, or schools within the trust to withstand a change of leadership or a sudden or unexpected departure of a member of staff.

What is included in a strategic plan?

A strategic plan turns a vision for what the trust wants to achieve into a plan that can be implemented and evaluated. Ultimately, the trust's board will hold the trust's single executive leader to account for the extent to which they have implemented the plan, how it has been implemented and what the results have been. The format and content of each trust's strategic plan will vary depending on the individual circumstances of the trust. Usually, however, strategic plans will:

- start from a clear statement of what the trust wants to achieve;
- set out where you are now and where the trust wants to get to;
- focus on delivering for pupils;
- define clearly the operating environment;
- identify key strategic risks and mitigation strategies; and
- consider a range of different scenarios and potential outcomes and what the trust would do in those circumstances – see risk management section.

Examples of developing people and leaders

A strategic development plan: mission, vision and values

Everyone involved in [STEP Academy Trust](#) understands the reason why the trust exists: to improve the life chances of all children; to create a family of outstanding academies where world class leaders place children at the heart of everything. However, whilst the trust grew organically from a partnership of two local schools, the trust recognised that a more strategic vision and approach was needed if STEP was to make a successful transition from a “cottage industry” to a more coherent organisation.

Creating a strategic development plan helped ensure that robust systems and structures were underpinned by a culture of unity, consistency, and support. To reassert their culture, STEP introduced the “[STEP Compass](#)” alongside governance restructure in order to guide academy communities both individually and collectively. The STEP Compass has been essential to shifting the mindset of individual governors away from individual schools towards governing the trust as a whole, and all the schools within it.

By ensuring a clear direction across the organisation, all stakeholders understand how they contribute to furthering the mission and vision of STEP. The Compass has had a major impact at every layer of the organisation. It brought greater clarity to the governance structure, and reinforced what it means to be part of STEP.

Keeping great teachers teaching

To help ensure that the great educationalists in [First Federation](#) can focus on making sure that teaching and learning are as good as it possibly can be, the trust has:

- redefined senior leadership roles; and
- created a back office function to perform vital administrative tasks, taking these away from school leaders.

The trust established the position of heads of teaching and learning (HoTL) overseen by an executive headteacher. The HoTL is the school's leader of teaching and learning and their core purpose is to improve the quality of teaching in every classroom. By removing many of the bureaucratic and clerical tasks from the role, HoTL is able to focus relentlessly on improving teaching, learning and therefore the outcomes for all children. This approach has empowered talented professionals to drive improvements. Over the past three years, First Federation has established a clear and focused leadership development programme which sees teachers becoming middle leaders (leading groups of four to six classes) within four years and potentially leading schools as a HoTL within six years.

Mentoring support for chief executives

The role and responsibilities of a MAT CEO differs quite significantly from that of headteacher. Accordingly, headteachers looking to make the transition may wish to draw on the experiences of successful CEOs.

Nicola Shipman became the CEO of [Steel City Schools Partnership](#) (SCSP), a three-school primary MAT, in 2013. The trust decided it was keen to expand, but recognised that its organisation – including the CEO – needed to develop their capacity in order to be ready for further growth.

As CEO, Nicola joined an ‘Aspiring to Excellence’ programme, aimed at developing MAT CEOs. As part of the programme, the trust’s CEO and trustees were partnered up with the CEO mentor from a successful trust, in this case the [Flying High Trust](#) (FHT) in Nottingham.

Through this relationship, SCSP trustees and employees – namely the CEO and Finance Director – with their FHT counterparts considered and discussed how to get the trust ready for future growth, including:

- the role of the CEO and delivering the trust’s vision
- expectations of trustees
- sharing of growth plans and scalability of school improvement plans
- considerations of expertise, capacity and resourcing
- preparedness for increased accountability.

Reflecting on CEO mentoring, Nicola said:

“I found the relationship with Chris [Wheatley, CEO] and FHT to be invaluable. It really helped focus both mine and the trust’s efforts on the areas that we needed to tighten and improve – such as setting out our growth strategy and business planning – towards getting our trust ready for sustainable growth. I know that Chris also felt it was a mutually beneficial relationship working with us as it helped inform some of FHT’s own processes and planning.

I would recommend any new CEO to get a mentor; you could do worse than researching other trusts that have started from a similar place to your school but are further along their growth journey and see if they would be interested in establishing a mentoring relationship.”

Development for chief executives

A pilot programme, [Executive Educators](#) was designed to equip MAT executive principals/CEOs with an understanding of the knowledge and skills required for their role, and provide them with access to a network of effective support so that they can transform schools and improve the life chances of the pupils they serve. The content was designed by successful MAT CEOs, other educational leaders and experts in finance, governance, strategy and business.

The tertiary-level (MBA) programme provided participants with access to high quality, face-to-face training and a range of unique opportunities for leadership development.

Topics included:

- Understanding the role of the CEO
- Defining your leadership style and tone
- Strategic visioning and planning
- Driving school improvement and the quality of teaching and learning
- Using finance for decision making and understanding performance
- Managing risk
- Driving strong and critical governance
- Recruiting, developing and aligning staff
- Managing the media and positioning your MAT (including brand management, stakeholder engagement and digital communications).

Testimonies from attendees can be found on the above link. Following the success of this pilot, a further [range of providers](#) have been approved to provide offering MAT CEO/leadership development programmes.

Special Schools in a multi-academy trust

On the growth of [Ambitions Academy Trust](#), their former CEO, Brian Hooper, outlines the benefits of having a SEND background and what this has meant for the wider trust – both pupils and staff – as the trust expanded.

The trust was formed out of an outstanding social, emotional and mental health (SEHM) school. Owing to the strength of the school's provision and the headteacher's NLE status, the school was asked to support and subsequently sponsor a local school in special measures, where pupil behaviour was of particular concern. Following the trust's support, this school became an outstanding school in under 2 years.

The trust has been successful in improving its schools by taking an unwavering approach to promoting strong leadership, an uncompromising focus on teaching and learning and developing latent talent at all levels. The central provision of 'back office' functions has enabled teachers and leaders to focus on performance and standards. Several years on, the trust now consists of 6 schools covering a range of special and mainstream provision at both primary and secondary phases, along with running [Ambitions Teaching School](#).

As a trust with several special schools, Ambitions has been well-placed to consider the needs of pupils across the trust – both pupils in mainstream and special provision. Given their special schools, the trust's strongest offer in terms of special provision is in managing pupils' behaviour and emotional and social difficulties. In their mainstream schools, this has enabled them to quickly overcome the behavioral issues often prevalent in underperforming schools and those in disadvantaged areas which frequently prove one of the greatest challenges in moving these schools on. This has been particularly advantageous in an perpetually underperforming secondary school which the trust has sponsored. In just under a year into the relationship, the school has gone from 'special measures' to 'good' in its Ofsted rating. For the special schools, becoming part of the trust has enabled them to overcome the isolation often experienced by special schools – something which is of great benefit to pupils and staff.

As a cross phase trust, the CEO reports that the whole trust has learnt a great deal from the meticulous lesson planning and preparation that is synonymous to effective primary schools.

In terms of CPD for teachers, the presence of special schools and the teaching school has supported the trust to not just give teachers outstanding training for how to accommodate with the full spectrum of pupils needs from SEND to mainstream, but also 'real life' setting to test out and embed their learning. In several instances having training in different settings leaders and teachers have decided to move from mainstream to special settings and vice versa.

Special units within a multi-academy trust

Katrina Morley, CEO of the [Tees Valley Education Trust](#), describes being in a MAT with special units and the benefits this bring to pupils, teachers and leaders in the trust.

The trust began when two outstanding primary academies, Brambles and Pennyman came together to form a small MAT. From the outset, the trust sponsored Dormanstown primary academy.

Both Dormanstown and Pennyman have specialist units providing education for children with a wide variety of additional and specialist needs. Committed to inclusive education, the trust is sharing best practice through its teaching school.

The trust formed with a view to becoming of a 'master of its own destiny' e.g. to have a greater role in a number of areas such as commissioning provision which best suits the needs of its pupil, having closer control over spending decisions, employing its own models of education etc.

The specific benefits the trust has been able to realise since its formation in September 2015, include:

- Being able to afford to employ specialist staff to be used across the trust to the benefit of pupils and parents, far quicker than if it was commissioned externally. These include:
 - an education psychologist
 - counsellors
 - a language therapist
 - a hydrotherapist
 - a physiotherapist.
- Pupils across the trust – able to attend special or mainstream education as required, according to their needs at that moment.
- Exchange of expertise and good practice between teachers in mainstream and special provision – both informally and through formalised training. This gives teachers a greater appreciation of the full range of all pupils' needs and the appropriate, differentiated support.
- Able to support a wider learning community where all children learn together – including holiday clubs and an inclusive choir – soon performing at the Royal Albert Hall!

Succession Planning: The “rule of three”

In regard to succession planning, many effective trusts recommend considering the “rule of three” for key posts in the trust, which asks:

- Who is the three-week replacement – to cover sickness?
- Who is the three-month replacement – should someone hand in their notice?
- Who is the three-year replacement – what is the trust’s long-term strategic plan?

What will RSCs look for?

The [Academies Financial Handbook](#) requires that the board of trustees of the academy trust has appointed, in writing, a senior executive leader, who may act as an *ex officio* trustee. This is a mandatory requirement. In standalone academies this will be the principal of the school; in MATs this will be a chief executive or equivalent. The role must be a permanent, not a rotating one. RSCs will not approve any arrangement where this is not the case.

For schools within any trust to be as effective as possible, they should have systems in place that support the development of each and every member of staff, and manage the talent within their trust. They should also have systems in place that hold staff to account for delivering for the pupils attending the schools within the trust. RSCs will not prescribe what these arrangements will look like, but they will want to be assured that a trust has the capacity within its workforce to deliver what it wants to achieve.

When agreeing whether a MAT has the capacity to grow, or when approving a MAT arrangement, RSCs will want to be reassured that:

- leaders understand the challenges the trust will face and had clear plans for tackling these;
- the trust understands how the roles of individual leaders will need to change as the trust grows;
- teaching expertise and other forms of best practice will be effectively spread through the trust;
- the trust is equipped to withstand turnover in personnel, and especially a change in leadership; and
- the trust has plans to recruit the finance, human resources and business experience appropriate to the size of the trust – though in some cases, outsourcing will be appropriate/necessary.

Financial Sustainability

The benefits of scale are clear. MATs are better able to plan and put in place efficient workforce structures, as well as drive savings in back-office costs and procurement – ensuring every pound works as hard as possible in improving outcomes for pupils. A number of reports, including those by accountancy firms acting for academy trusts, have benchmarked spend in non-frontline areas, and identified areas where savings are realised from being in a MAT. Many MATs have found, for example, that having a single procurement function helps the schools within the trust utilise collective purchasing power, benefit from procurement expertise, and manage contracts on services such as reprographics and catering effectively. One report surveyed more than 500 schools, and found that, on average, MATs were able to help primary schools realise savings in the order of £145 per pupil. This represents just over 3.5% of the average Dedicated Schools Grant per pupil funding, allocated to primary schools in 2015-16.⁶

Trusts that are sufficiently large (at least 1,200 pupils for primary trusts and 2,000 pupils for mixed or secondary trusts) will be better able to absorb costs pressures relating to the central overheads, drive value for money and be financially sustainable in the long term. The transition from a stand-alone academy to a MAT will not automatically bring economies of scale, or efficiencies, because there may also be additional central costs. It can, however, unlock new opportunities to secure efficiencies – and therefore the financial resilience highlighted above – in the medium to longer term as the trust grows. The Department, in collaboration with schools and sector organisations, has produced [guidance](#) – including a range of tools – which may be of use to trusts looking for support on efficiency and financial health.

⁶ Kreston Academies Benchmark Report 2016, page 32

10 ways MATs ensure financial effectiveness

We asked a number of MATs, what it is about being a MAT that supports them to achieve financial effectiveness. This is what they told us:

1. Clear strategic planning is vital. Unless you know what your vision and objectives are, you cannot ensure that you are making the best possible use of your resources to deliver your vision.
2. Financial planning and forecasting look ahead on a at least a three-year (and often five-year) basis and reflects potential changes in circumstances, such as increases and decreases in pupil numbers or a New Funding Formula.
3. The MAT's workforce is designed to support the effective and efficient delivery of the curriculum across all the schools in the MAT. Legacy structures or hierarchies are not automatically retained.
4. The MAT structure can increase the scope for trust to consider having centralised functions and collective procurement, particularly as scale increases. This reduces duplication, reduces costs and improves value for money.
5. The scope to generate additional income from commercial activities across the MAT is utilised, and used to support the aims and objectives of the trust.
6. Value for money of spending is tested and benchmarked against schools operating in a similar context. Many trusts do this by either using the Department's [benchmarking tool](#), or by direct comparison to other trusts.
7. Centralised robust financial systems enable the trust board to have effective oversight and control of finances and promote a value for money culture. This becomes more important as trusts grow.
8. Careful consideration is given to the level of local control over spending. In some trusts the [General Annual Grant](#) is paid to individual academies who hold any surpluses in their individual accounts whereas in others funds are held and controlled centrally by the MAT which then distributes funding in line with agreed budgets. Some trusts vary the proportion of funding they retain, to reflect the different circumstances of individual schools.
9. When trusts retain a proportion of an individual schools funding, they are transparent about what proportion they are retaining, how this proportion is determined, and what services and functions it enabled the trust to provide.
10. Key financial and other decisions from the trust board are clearly communicated to academies and LGBs and vice versa.

Examples of identifying efficiency savings

Securing efficiencies across small primary schools

[WISE Academies Trust](#) is focused on maximising outcomes in the context of a trust of small primary academies, where effective use of resources is paramount to ensuring sustainability and viability. In a tight financial context, it is essential that trusts explore all available opportunities for efficiencies and innovation.

The trust's own in-house centralised finance, governance and HR functions are co-located and this gives effective control of trust employment levels and costs. There is a clear and determined focus at WISE Academies head office on ensuring compliance and maximising value for money wherever such opportunities exist. Financial benchmarking, both internal and external, and joint procurement are used to drive efficiency. Specific examples of joint procurement of goods and services include insurances, assessment materials, learning resources and joint continuing professional development (CPD). The bulk discounts available through centralised purchasing are sometimes as much as 20%. This frees up more resource to invest in teaching and learning.

Expanded leadership is not affordable in all academy settings but this does not mean that the smaller settings have less monitoring or lower accountability. WISE is successful because of the true inter-academy collaboration that takes place including joint moderation, peer review, external quality assurance, common practices and shared CPD. The joint working that takes place across the whole organisation has ensured that there is trust-wide understanding of what constitutes outstanding practice and it is clear that this joined up approach can only work effectively in a MAT such as WISE Academies.

It is clear that there are factors that cannot be controlled such as changes to funding formula and local demand for pupil places. Working as a trust adds resilience from the impact of diminishing resource. Sometimes decisive action needs to be taken in response to particular circumstances. In one of the trust's academies, careful three-year financial planning highlighted that the staffing costs were becoming unaffordable due to a slight decline in pupil numbers. The trust looked at how class sizes throughout the school could be kept at a sustainable level whilst maintaining capacity for school improvement. A coordinated approach was taken in relation to this situation so that vacancies at other academies in the trust could be filled by the redeployment of surplus staff. This avoided the need for any redundancy payments and reduced trust advertising costs.

Funding central functions and services

[First Federation](#) does not have a 'traditional top slice arrangement – its six schools contributions range from 3-5% proportionate to its 'need', as defined by the trust. Of its total budget, the trust uses 3% to pay for 'central functions' meaning the executive principal, a business manager and a central administrator. The senior teaching leadership roles have been redefined, so that they are focused on improving teaching and learning and free from wider bureaucracy. At the same time the central office and business arm is kept lean and streamlined so that the maximum amount of funding can be directed to supporting teaching and learning.

To realise savings, all major contracts for services are negotiated as one trust, as opposed to six smaller schools. At individual school level, each school is allocated a budget for consumables, curriculum resources, professional development and supply cover. Schools can then bid to the 'centre' for further money for maintenance projects, who will tender for the best price on their behalf.

By avoiding a large back office business structure, the trust is able to reduce the amount of top slice for central costs. This enables it to put more money into the front line making small primary schools (90 – 100 pupils) sustainable and viable.

What will RSCs look for?

For a trust to be successful, and deliver the curriculum and results it wants for its pupils, it must have strong and sustainable finances. RSCs will want to see evidence that enables them to assess whether:

- there is sufficient financial expertise to oversee the trust's financial operations;
- financial planning is integrated in to the trusts overall strategy for its school(s);
- the trust's vision remains deliverable and resilient to operational changes in income, such as changes in pupil numbers or characteristics or the implications of the introduction of a national funding formula. Scenario or sensitivity analysis can be used to evidence this;
- there are robust contingency plans in place, with clear triggers for enacting these plans; and
- the accounting officer has sufficient oversight and control of their finances, to enable them to achieve value for money and ensure propriety with public money.

Before agreeing that a MAT can expand the number of schools it runs, or a standalone academy can create or join a MAT, RSCs will assess whether:

- the plans to grow the size of the trust are credible – and that the trust understands that while growth can bring about economies of scale, there are also costs associated with centralising functions. Where a trust’s plans are such that they want to remain small (e.g. below 1,200 pupils for primary trusts and 2,000 for mixed or secondary trusts), the RSC may recognise the financial limitations and be more cautious. They may ask to see more detailed plans, including how the trust’s senior leadership team will be funded from across the schools;
- plans to secure efficiency savings through economies of scale are realistic and have been benchmarked against other trusts;
- any central functions are properly costed and sustainable, and that there are clear plans that set out how these functions will be paid for, for example, through a charge or “top-slice” to individual schools within the trust;
- these centrally delivered functions deliver value for money for constituent schools; and
- the trust’s financial processes are sufficiently robust to withstand the increased responsibility of the trust, and in particular the need to ensure propriety and value for money across a wider number of schools

Risk Management

Academy trusts are accountable for educational outcomes, financial management, safeguarding (including health and safety) and estate management in their trusts. The boards of trustees are responsible for risk management – particularly setting the parameters of the process and reviewing and considering the results. Effective risk management underpins effective planning elsewhere like strategic finance. While they may choose to delegate the day-to-day management of some risks to staff or professional advisers, the trust's involvement should be such that within the trustees' annual report they can make the required risk management statement with confidence.

10 ways effective MATs manage risk

MATs are organisations responsible for running multiple schools. As such it is imperative that they give due concern to managing risk at both school and organisation level. When asked, effective MATs described the following elements at key:

1. Risks – and the impact if they materialise – are identified in a central register. They are monitored and mitigated effectively at both school and trust level, often by an audit committee.
2. The MAT learns from effective risk management processes from other sectors.
3. It is clear which risks should be managed locally, and which are escalated to, or held by, the central MAT.
4. Each risk is owned by a named person, so that no risk or issue 'falls between a gap'. Those accountable have the ability to act decisively to manage risks when needed.
5. The trust is clear how risk management will need to develop and evolve as the trust grows in size.
6. Effective due diligence takes place before the MAT agrees to a school joining the trust. This means the trust fully understands all the risks, assets, and liabilities they would take on, and either put appropriate plans in place, or decide that it is not appropriate for the school to join the trust at that time.
7. Any due diligence is carried out by a person or persons with sufficient skills and experience. Specialists can be employed or contracted if those skills do not already exist within the trust.
8. A specific board member is responsible for managing their estates. In smaller trusts this could be the Chief Executive or Chief Operating Officer in small trust, while larger MATs may set aside a dedicated board position, such as a Director of Estates.
9. Legal requirements relating to the estate, including requirements relating to health and safety, and specific potential threats such as legionella, asbestos and fire are

well understood. (See DfE [guidance for those responsible for the operation and maintenance of school buildings](#).)

10. Comprehensive knowledge of buildings and their condition enables the MAT to plan and prioritise maintenance and construction work. For MATs with at least five academies and 3000 pupils, they will receive a [school condition allocation](#) whereas smaller trusts will need to bid for funding through the [Condition Improvement Fund](#).

Due diligence

What due diligence should we do?

Due diligence involves investigating, researching and examining the background and financial condition, business operations and contractual obligations of a (person or) organisation. The National Association of School Business Managers (NASBM) believes the following should be investigated under due diligence:

- Income / expenditure and budgets / liabilities and assets – 3 years prior and forward looking
- Pupil numbers - 3 years prior and forward looking
- Scrutiny of board minutes, legal and HR contracts, any accounts / financial statements, internal audit reports
- Skills and experience at the entity under review.

This list is not exhaustive and all relevant documentation should be investigated. Details of due diligence conducted should be recorded, reported and retained.

Further details on due diligence can be found on the [NASBM EFA academies library](#).

Examples of risk management

Managing the buildings and the school estate

[Outwood Grange Academies Trust](#) started in 2009 and has since grown to 21 academies, with a varied estate including new builds and old red brick schools.

The trust wants to ensure that the capital investment it makes has the maximum impact on outcome for pupils, and so this is a key part of their curriculum-led financial plan. It has built up its reserves to embark on significant capital projects, including replacing an old prefabricated ('clasp') building at a primary academy, building a new sports hall at a secondary academy and lots of other projects.

The trust has a dedicated estates director who leads the estates team and works directly to the CEO. The estates team maintains a three-year capital plan for each academy, ensuring that projects are prioritised across the estate on the basis of need.

The estates team also collates and centrally holds all relevant data on the estate, including condition surveys, health and safety inspections and projected student numbers. It ensures that the relevant health and safety and site management policies and procedures are followed consistently across the MAT. This means that the necessary burden of ensuring each and every school in the trust meets its statutory obligations when it comes to ensuring their buildings are safe and secure is removed from the respective headteacher, who can focus on ensuring that excellent teaching and learning takes place.

What will RSCs look for?

When determining whether to approve an academy arrangement, either a standalone academy or MAT, RSCs will take in to account what is known about the way successful academy trusts manage risk. In particular they will test whether:

- the trust has the capacity to fulfil the mandatory requirements set out in the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) especially if, having consulted with the Education Funding Agency (EFA), they know that it has not fulfilled those responsibilities in the past;
- there are effective procedures in place to identify, monitor and mitigate at both school and trust level - risk management is not a box-ticking exercise;
- its scheme of delegation makes clear what risks are managed at what level so no issues 'fall between the gaps';

- the trust has a clear idea of how the way it manages risk may need to change as the trust grows, and has made a balanced assessment of the risks expansion and opportunities might pose to its existing schools;
- the trust has access to appropriate due diligence expertise so that they can be confident the trust knows what it is taking on (both in terms of benefits and risks) when an additional school joins it; and
- the trust has capacity to manage the estate for which they are responsible.

Further Reading

The following good practice guidance for MATs draws on a numbers of sources about what existing strong academy trusts do to be effective. This includes evidence already published elsewhere, and surveys and analysis of the structures of existing MATs carried out by the Department for Education.

Overarching

Cambridge Education: [*Growing multi-academy trusts in the East of England and North East London*](#) (2016)

Carter, D: [*The nine characteristics of successful multi-academy trusts*](#) (2016)

UK Government: [*Expanding your academy trust: resources for multi-academy trusts*](#) (2016)

National Association of School Business Managers: [*EFA Academies Library*](#) (2016)

New Schools Network: [*Building a School Chain*](#) workshop materials (2015)

On SEND requirements

UK Government: [*Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years*](#) (2015)

On supporting school improvement

Armstrong, P: [*Effective School Partnerships and Collaboration for School Improvement: a Review of the Evidence*](#) (2015)

Day C., Sammons P., Hopkins D., Harris A., Leithwood K., Gu Q. and Brown E. '[*10 Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership*](#)' (2010)

Data Management Review Group: [*Eliminating unnecessary workload associated with data management*](#) (2016)

Marking Policy Review Group: [*Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking*](#) (2016)

Planning and Resources Review Group: [*Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources*](#) (2016)

On governance

The East Midlands & Humber RSC toolkit includes [sample governance structures and schemes of delegation for MATs](#) alongside a range of other tools and templates to help MATs develop and grow.

The National Governors Association (NGA) has developed a wide range of support to help MAT boards fulfil their functions effectively. This includes [guidance on what governing bodies and school leaders should expect from their roles](#), a [checklist of 21 questions](#) for MAT self-assessment, guidance for schools [considering conversion](#) and [model schemes of delegation](#). NGA will also soon be publishing a guide specifically for those new to MAT governance.

To find out about National Leaders of Governors - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/system-leaders-who-they-are-and-what-they-do#national-leaders-of-governance-nlgs>

FASNA have also produced a number of [guides on effective governance](#).

On financial sustainability

UK Government: [Setting up and running a charity](#)

UK Government: [The essential trustee: what you need to know, what you need to do \(CC3\)](#) (2012, updated 2015)

UK Government: [Internal financial controls for charities \(CC8\)](#) (2012)

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In 2015, the Department for Education carried out a survey of 67 established MATs. This survey was followed by a number of roundtable and one-to-one discussions with schools and trusts. The evidence provided by trusts in these fora has been used throughout this document. Many trusts have been generous in providing case studies for this document, and we thank them for their contributions.



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